

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1 1. A method for providing a forum for user interaction, comprising:
2 creating one or more clones of the forum wherein each clone is an instance of the
3 forum, thereby allowing any number of users to be in the same forum while limiting the
4 number of users in each instance of the forum;
5 determining whether a relationship exists between a user entering the forum and one
6 or more other users entering the forum or one or more other users already in the forum; and
7 if a relationship exists, placing the user entering the forum in a clone of the forum
8 based on the relationship.
- 1 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating one or more forums
3 the user has been in;
4 receiving information from one or more other users indicating one or more forums
5 each of the other users has been in; and
6 determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another
7 user if the user and the other user both have been in the same second forum, the second
8 forum being different from the forum the user is entering.
- 1 3. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating what clones of what
3 forums the user has been in;
4 receiving information from one or more other users indicating what clones of what
5 forums each of the other users has been in; and
6 determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another
7 user if the user and the other user both have been in the same clone of a forum.
- 1 4. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
2 receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating the domain name of
3 the user's address;
4 receiving information from one or more other users indicating the domain names of

5 the addresses of each of the other users; and
 6 determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another
 7 user if the user entering the forum and the other user both have the same domain name.

1 5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 2 receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating a country
 3 associated with the user's address;
 4 receiving information from one or more other users indicating a country associated
 5 with each of the other user's addresses; and
 6 determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another
 7 user if the user entering the forum and the other user both have addresses associated with the
 8 same country.

1 6. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 2 receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating a language in which
 3 the user prefers to communicate;
 4 receiving information from one or more other users indicating a language in which
 5 each of the other users prefers to communicate; and
 6 determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another
 7 user if the user entering the forum and the other user prefer to communicate in the same
 8 language.

1 7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 2 receiving an indication from the user entering the forum or from one or more other
 3 users that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and one or more other
 4 users.

1 8. The method of claim 7 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user in
 2 a clone other than a clone containing a designated user with whom a relationship exists.

1 9. The method of claim 1 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user in
 2 a clone with another user with whom a relationship exists.

1 10. The method of claim 1 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user in
2 the clone with another user with whom a relationship exists and who most recently entered
3 the forum.

1 11. The method of claim 1, further comprising limiting the number of users in each
2 instance of the forum to a maximum number.

1 12. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 limiting the number of users in each instance of the forum to a threshold number,
3 except if a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and one or more other
4 users; and
5 placing the user entering the forum in a clone with more than the threshold number of
6 users only if a relationship exists between the user and one or more of the other users in the
7 clone or entering the clone.

1 13. The method of claim 12, further comprising:
2 receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating what clones of what
3 forums the user has been in;
4 receiving information from one or more other users indicating what clones of what
5 forums each of the other users has been in; and
6 determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another
7 user if the user and the other user both have been in the same clone of a forum.

1 14. The method of claim 1 wherein the forum comprises an interactive forum maintained
2 by a system of one or more computers in which users interact by submitting messages and
3 reading messages from other users as they are submitted.

1 15. The method of claim 1 wherein the forum comprises an interactive virtual world
2 maintained by a system of one or more computers where users interact by moving avatars,
3 each user having one or more avatars in the virtual world, and observing the movement of the
4 avatars in the virtual world.

- 1 16. A computer system for providing a forum for user interaction comprising:
2 means for sending and receiving content to and from a network;
3 means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for creating one or more
4 clones of the forum wherein each clone is an instance of the forum, thereby allowing any
5 number of users to be in the same forum while limiting the number of users in each instance
6 of the forum;
7 means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for determining whether a
8 relationship exists between a user entering the forum and one or more other users entering
9 the forum or one or more other users already in the forum and, if a relationship exists,
10 placing the user entering the forum in a clone of the forum based on the relationship.
- 1 17. The computer system of claim 16, further comprising:
2 means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating one or
3 more forums the user has been in;
4 means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating one or more
5 forums each of the other users has been in; and
6 means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum
7 and another user if the user and the other user both have been in the same second forum, the
8 second forum being different from the forum the user is entering.
- 1 18. The computer system of claim 16, further comprising
2 means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating what
3 clones of what forums the user has been in;
4 means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating what clones
5 of what forums each of the other users has been in; and
6 means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum
7 and another user if the user and the other user both have been in the same clone of a second
8 forum, the second forum being different from the forum the user is entering.
- 1 19. The computer system of claim 16 further comprising:
2 means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating the

3 domain name of the user's address;
4 means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating the domain
5 names of the addresses of each of the other users; and
6 means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum
7 and another user if the user entering the forum and the other user both have the same domain
8 name.

1 20. The computer system of claim 16, further comprising:
2 means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating a country
3 associated with the user's address;
4 means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating a country
5 associated with each of the other user's addresses; and
6 means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum
7 and another user if the user entering the forum and the other user both have addresses
8 associated with the same country.

1 21. The computer system of claim 16, further comprising:
2 means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating a
3 language in which the user prefers to communicate;
4 means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating a language
5 in which each of the other users prefers to communicate; and
6 means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum
7 and another user if the user entering the forum and the other user prefer to communicate in
8 the same language.

1 22. The system of claim 16, further comprising means for receiving an indication from
2 the user entering the forum or from one or more other users that a relationship exists between
3 the user entering the forum and one or more other users.

1 23. The system of claim 22 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user
2 in a clone other than a clone containing a designated user with whom a relationship exists.

1 24. The system of claim 16 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user
2 in a clone with another user with whom a relationship exists.

1 25. The system of claim 16 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user
2 in the clone with another user with whom a relationship exists and who most recently entered
3 the forum.

1 26. The system of claim 16, further comprising means for limiting the number of users in
2 each instance of the forum to a maximum number.

1 27. The system of claim 16, further comprising:
2 means for limiting the number of users in each instance of the forum to a threshold
3 number, except if a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and one or more
4 other users; and
5 means for placing the user entering the forum in a clone with more than the threshold
6 number of users only if a relationship exists between the user and one or more of the other
7 users in the clone or entering the clone.

1 28. The system of claim 27, further comprising:
2 means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating what
3 clones of what forums the user has been in;
4 means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating what clones
5 of what forums each of the other users has been in; and
6 means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum
7 and another user if the user and the other user both have been in the same clone of a forum.

1 29. The system of claim 16 wherein the forum comprises an interactive forum maintained
2 by a system of one or more computers in which users interact by submitting messages and
3 reading messages from other users as they are submitted.

1 30. The system of claim 16 wherein the forum comprises an interactive virtual world
2 maintained by a system of one or more computers where users interact by moving avatars,
3 each user having one or more avatars in the virtual world, and observing the movement of the
4 avatars in the virtual world.

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